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Origin of Shina Language

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Shina is the language spoken in Gilgit region and the surrounding area.

Shina belongs to the Dard group of languages which cover the hilly region situated towards the north of the plains of the Panjab. There are five members of the Dard group: Khowar—the language of Chitral, Kafir—the language of Kafiristan, Kohistani—the language of Indus Kohistan, Shina—the language of Gilgit region, and Kashmiri—the language spoken in Kashmir and the surrounding area. Out of these five languages Kohistani, Shina and Kashmiri form an internal smaller group. This only means that these three are nearer to one another as regards their stock of words, construction and mode of thought than the remaining two. Khowar and Kafir which are neighbours and their homeland covers the region beyond the watershed of mountains on the West of Gilgit region, are more closely related to one another than the remaining three.

We have got a large family of languages called the Aryan languages. One sub-family of this large family is spoken in Europe. The other sub-family is spoken in Asia. One of the groups in the Asian-Aryan languages is the Perso-Aryan group which is spoken in Persia. The other is the Indo-Aryan group which is spoken in India. The Dard group is in between the Perso-Aryan and Indo-Aryan groups in its stock of words.

tract upto Dras in south-east. In the north the Aryan shins went up along the Sind and then diverted their forces in the valley of Gilgit river and its tributaries. The shins subdued this area between 1200 and 1000, B.C. Here lived a race of Turanian stock called Pisachas. These military hands of fighting shins did not bring womenfolk with them. They married with the locals. Thus a new race came into existence called the Yashkuns, which represents a mixture of Shins and Pisachas.

A linguistic fight in the Gilgit region began to rage between the original Pisacha language of the local people and the then prevailing mother tongue of the invading Aryans. This language of the Aryans was the primary Vedic language, which had retained in it many words, phrases and grammatical peculiarities of the Basic-Aryan language. This fight went on for about 200 years, till the whole mass of humanity in this region had been homogenised by the social forces. During this period of impact of these two heterogeneous groups, Shina language came into existence.

The original inhabitants of the area were Turanian by blood called Pisachas. They spoke a Mangoloid language. In fact the whole of the Dard group area was then covered by Pisacha people. They spoke a peculiar language which is dead in Asia. The only representative of this Pisacha stock which has survived to this day is Broshishki language spoken in Hunza. The valley of Hunza is situated at a high altitude, and is surrounded on all sides by high mountains. There is no attraction for an invader. There have been few chances for a foreign language to enter this area. Broshishki, therefore, has retained some of the prominent features of the original Pisacha language. Asia has got no other representative of Pisacha stock, and Broshishki stands alone in its field. In Australia the aborigines speak some languages which are akin to Broshishki. Probably in those days there was a land or water contact with Australia.

Shina possesses many peculiar features. In fact all the Dard

languages possess these peculiarities. Some of the tenses, and grammatical forms agree with the Indo-Aryan group, and others agree with the Perso-Aryan group; while there are certain other grammatical features which do not agree with any of these two groups. These have been derived from the Pisacha language which was originally spoken in this area. These are also found in Broshishki of today.

Taking into consideration the stock of words most of these belong to Aryan origin, one-half belongs to the Perso-Aryan group and the other half to the Indo-Aryan group. Some of the words do not belong to any of these two groups. These have apparently been derived from the Broshishki stock of words.

When we consider the grammar, the sounds and the stock of words of the Dard languages, we find that they are a mixture of the linguistic qualities of Perso-Aryan and Indo-Aryan groups. It does not mean that they have borrowed these from the two groups separately. It means that Dard languages have derived these common features from the Basic-Aryan language, from which both the Perso-Aryan and Indo-Aryan groups have been built up. Pisacha language being the indigenous language of the soil, gave to Dard languages its sounds in general and some words.

The Dard group of languages is also called Pisacha Group of languages. These are called Dard, because these are spoken by Shin Dards who are Aryan by race and Dard languages are basically Aryan languages. In some books we find they are called Pisacha languages because they have got in them an element which represents the Pisacha linguistic characteristics. I would prefer to call them Dard languages because the characteristics of the Dard elements are more prominent and clear. These are basically Aryan languages and therefore we should not name them pisacha.

When in Shina homeland, I asked many prominent people, about Dard race or where this group of people lives at present.

They always answered in the negative. The inhabitants of this area, do not call themselves Dards. They have got no mention of any race called Dard in their oral history, as they have got no written literature upto this time. I do not know how this group of people and languages came to be known as Dard, and who gave them this name in books to start with.

Outside the homeland of Shina, the languages which possess characteristics nearest to this language are modern Panjabi, Lahnda and Singh. Certain features were derived by all these languages from the original indigenous language which was current in the whole of this area before the advent of the Aryans. Particular features were selected by each language, and these became distinct from one another as centuries rolled on.

Here is a very important linguistic evidence which no other field of research provides. We come to the conclusion that the Pisacha race occupied the whole of the area which extends from Chitral and Gilgit to Hyderabad and Nawabshah, before the Aryans occupied this land. The Aryans when they invaded northern India horde after horde, did not meet and conquer the Dravidians or the Harappens who are called people of the Indus civilisation, but they fought with the Pisachas. This conclusion although provided by research in the field of language may lead to very important results in the field of history.

Language Problems in Certain Multilingual Societies

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I was born in Wales, where about a third of the population is bilingual in Welsh and English. My first teaching job overseas was in Czechoslovakia where, at that time, most people understood German, their mother-tongue being, of course, Czech or Slovak. I then worked for several years in Burma, where a quite remarkable variety of languages flourished. During the three years between my departure from Burma and my coming to Pakistan, I visited various countries, in three of which all educated people were bilingual or multilingual. I went to Luxembourg, where people seemed equally at home in Luxembourgish, a rather Flemish dialect of German, German itself and French. In a trip to Africa, I visited Guinea and Tunisia. In Guinea all people with a secondary education spoke at least one West African language and had a magnificent command of French. In Tunisia the same magnificent command of French was matched by a striking devotion to Arabic literature and culture.

In Pakistan I find myself again in a multilingual society, but I do not propose to address myself to any of your language problems, or to any of the cultural and communicative problems that arise from the diversity of languages current in your country. So many people here can speak on these matters from far greater knowledge and insight than I possess. However, I trust that a discussion of some of the language problems of other multilingual societies may be of some interest and relevance to those of us whose first concern is with language problems in Pakistan.